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Uncle's Most Mysterious Agency

A FORMER Bulgarian Communist diplomat, whose duties included a four-year stint at the United Nations, has pleaded guilty to a charge of spying for the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency.

Ticking off his avowed misdeeds in a rambling two-hour discourse, he begged the Bulgarian court for severe punishment because "I have committed the greatest crime that can be committed."

Were the charges and the confession legitimate and true, in whole or in part? Or was this another of the Communists' stage-crafted travesties on truth and justice?

WELL, who knows? For its part, the CIA said it would adhere to its custom of not commenting on published allegations about its operations.

This, it seems to us, is a sensible and justifiable attitude on the CIA's part. The collection of intelligence is a ruthless busi-

ness, and one of its cardinal rules has to be neither to confirm nor deny espionage allegations involving foreign governments. Even if charges in a given case were false, it would be futile to deny them. If, on the other hand, they were true, it would be an act of idiocy to admit it.

HOWEVER, in noting a case where the CIA has properly draped itself with the cloak of secrecy, it is also pertinent to take cognizance of increasing criticism of the CIA for not only overdoing the secrecy bit but for vastly exceeding its original functions and scope.

No less a personage than former President Harry S. Truman has been among those leveling this accusation. Others, including newsmen who covered the turbulence climaxed by the camp in South Viet Nam, have insisted that the CIA has arrogated to itself sweeping policy-making powers.

UNFORTUNATELY, it is virtually impossible to determine the truth or falsity of these charges — by reason of the fact that the CIA is Uncle Sam's most mysterious agency. The practice is for Congress to hand the CIA the increasing sums of money it requests, with no questions asked — or, at any rate, no questions answered.

No agency of government, however delicate its mission, should be that sacrosanct. Atomic energy happens to be a pretty sensitive area, too, yet Congress has a Joint Committee on Atomic Energy serving as a knowledgeable watchdog. Logically, there should be a similarly-constituted committee keeping watch on the CIA to make certain the agency is doing, and doing properly and efficiently, the intelligence work it is supposed to be doing — no more and no less.